Efforts to Improve Social Studies Learning Achievement of Grade VIII.1 Students at SMPN 33 Padang through the Teaching the Right Level (TARL) Approach

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ABSTRACT:
This classroom action research aims to improve the learning outcomes of Social Science (IPS) students in class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang. The main issue was the low average score of 63.33, with only 50% of students achieving the minimum passing grade (≥70). To address this issue, the study utilized the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach integrated with a problem-based learning model. The research employed a classroom action research method conducted over two cycles. Data collection techniques included learning outcome tests, observations, and interviews, while data analysis was performed using descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods. The results demonstrated significant improvements. In the first cycle, the average score increased to 69.89, with 65% of students achieving the minimum passing grade. However, observations revealed that some students remained passive during learning. Based on these reflections, the second cycle focused on enhancing student activity and engagement, resulting in an average score of 83.3, with 90% of students meeting the passing criteria. Furthermore, students showed greater enthusiasm and active participation in group discussions. In conclusion, the TaRL approach implemented through the problem-based learning model effectively enhanced the learning outcomes of Social Science students. This study recommends that teachers adopt similar approaches and educational institutions support their implementation.
Keywords: Learning Achievement, Social Studies, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), PBL, CAR.

ABSTRAK:
Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan prestasi belajar Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) siswa kelas VIII.1 SMPN 33 Padang. Masalah utama yang dihadapi adalah rendahnya rata-rata nilai IPS siswa sebesar 63,33, dengan hanya 50% siswa mencapai ketuntasan belajar (≥70). Untuk mengatasi permasalahan ini, penelitian menggunakan pendekatan Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) yang diintegrasikan dengan model problem based learning. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian tindakan kelas (classroom action research) yang dilakukan dalam dua siklus. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi tes hasil belajar, observasi, dan wawancara, sedangkan teknik analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan. Pada siklus I, rata-rata nilai meningkat menjadi 69,89 dengan 65% siswa mencapai ketuntasan. Namun, observasi menunjukkan masih adanya siswa yang pasif dalam pembelajaran. Berdasarkan refleksi, siklus II memfokuskan pada peningkatan aktivitas dan keterlibatan siswa, sehingga rata-rata nilai meningkat menjadi 83,3 dengan 90% siswa tuntas. Selain itu, siswa menjadi

lebih aktif dan antusias dalam diskusi kelompok. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa pendekatan TaRL yang diimplementasikan melalui model problem based learning efektif dalam meningkatkan prestasi belajar IPS siswa. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan guru untuk mengadopsi pendekatan serupa dan institusi pendidikan untuk mendukung implementasinya.
Kata Kunci: Prestasi Belajar, IPS, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), PBL, PTK.

A. INTRODUCTION

Social Studies (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial or IPS) is one of the essential subjects that equips students with an understanding of community life, culture, and the social environment. The objective of Social Studies education is to develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to think critically and creatively, and to actively participate in social life. However, the implementation of Social Studies learning often faces various challenges, particularly in enhancing active student engagement in the learning process.

At the junior high school level, Social Studies covers a wide range of content, including history, geography, economics, and sociology. Nevertheless, the teaching methods used in the classroom are often teacher-centered, emphasizing memorization of facts rather than encouraging students to explore or deeply understand social issues. As a result, students' interest in Social Studies tends to be low, which subsequently affects their academic achievement.

In response to this situation, the author focused on efforts to improve the quality of Social Studies learning through innovative approaches. The Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, integrated with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, is seen as having potential to address these challenges. This research aims to explore the effectiveness of this integrated approach in improving student achievement and engagement among Class VIII.1 students at SMPN 33 Padang.

This concern is reflected in the results of the first Social Studies quiz in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang, particularly in the basic competence of describing the diversity of landforms, their formation processes, and their impact on human life. The class average score was only 63.33, with only 50% of students scoring 70 or above. This figure falls significantly below the ideal target, which expects at least 85% of students to achieve a minimum score of 70 to meet classical mastery criteria. Initial observations indicated that students appeared bored during Social Studies lessons, often complaining of headaches and fatigue. The daily learning process, dominated by lectures and individual assignments with minimal peer interaction across different ability levels, is suspected to be the primary cause of the students' low interest and achievement.

This situation creates a gap between the theory and practice of teaching. Theoretically, Social Studies learning should be designed to actively involve students in exploring social issues, developing critical thinking skills, and fostering curiosity. In practice, however, the learning process in Class VIII.1 remains teacher-centered and expository, providing little room for student interaction and peer learning. Initial observation data and quiz results indicate that the current approach has not succeeded in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

This study aims to bridge that gap by exploring the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, integrated with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, to

significantly enhance student engagement and academic achievement.

In response to these challenges, the researcher considers it crucial to design a more relevant and engaging Social Studies learning environment that enables active student participation. One approach that has been promoted by the government and shows great potential in addressing learning challenges is Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL).

The TaRL approach is based on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning. TaRL focuses on grouping students based on their actual learning levels rather than their age or grade level, to provide learning experiences that are aligned with their individual needs. By tailoring content and instructional methods to students' actual abilities, TaRL is expected to improve their motivation, engagement, and comprehension.

Another advantage of TaRL is its collaborative nature. Through this approach, students are encouraged to learn in peer groups with similar ability levels, creating a learning atmosphere that supports social interaction and the exchange of experiences. This approach helps to minimize intellectual gaps among students and fosters self-confidence. In the context of Social Studies learning, the application of TaRL is enriched by the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, which emphasizes solving real-life problems. This enables students not only to understand concepts but also to apply them in everyday life.

The combination of the TaRL approach and the PBL model can make Social Studies learning more engaging, relevant, and effective, and is therefore expected to increase students' interest and academic performance.

Based on the background outlined above, the research problem can be formulated as follows: Can the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach implemented through the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model improve Social Studies learning achievement in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang in the 2024/2025 academic year?

This study aims to improve students' academic achievement, particularly in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang, through the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach combined with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model. The TaRL approach is designed to help students achieve the expected basic competencies based on their respective levels of ability. The PBL model adds a dimension of real-world problem-solving to the learning process, enabling students not only to grasp fundamental concepts but also to apply them in daily life.

The TaRL approach is highly relevant for classrooms with diverse student ability levels. In conventional instruction, lower-performing students often fall behind, while higher-performing students are not sufficiently challenged. This results in significant learning gaps. TaRL seeks to reduce this gap by aligning learning activities with students' actual capabilities, allowing each individual to learn at an appropriate pace and level.

The PBL model adds a collaborative element to the learning process. Through PBL, students are invited to work in groups, solve real-world problems, and discuss possible solutions (Syaputra & Sariyatun, 2019). This process not only enhances students' critical thinking skills but also strengthens their social competencies, such as communication, collaboration, and leadership. In the context of Social Studies, PBL allows students to understand how

social theories can be applied to address real-life challenges.

The findings of this study are expected to offer broad benefits for various stakeholders. For students, this research is expected to improve academic achievement while also offering a more enjoyable and engaging learning experience. Active participation in peer learning groups is expected to boost self-confidence, foster stronger relationships among students, and improve overall classroom dynamics.

For teachers, this research provides new insights into innovative teaching strategies. The TaRL approach offers a student-centered alternative, while the PBL model helps teachers create a more dynamic learning environment. Through the combination of these two approaches, teachers can overcome the monotony and lack of student involvement that often characterize conventional instruction.

For schools, the results of this study are anticipated to serve as valuable input for enhancing educational quality. The implementation of TaRL and PBL not only supports the achievement of learning mastery targets but also elevates the school's reputation as an institution that embraces educational innovation.

For future research, this study can serve as a reference and foundation for further development. For instance, the effectiveness of the TaRL approach can be tested in other subjects such as Mathematics, Science, or Bahasa Indonesia. In addition, future research could expand the application of TaRL to different educational levels, such as primary or senior secondary schools, to explore the adaptability and sustainability of this approach.

With these various expected benefits, this research not only focuses on improving learning outcomes in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang but also contributes to the development of relevant, innovative, and student-oriented teaching practices.

B. METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is cyclical in nature and consists of four main stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted at SMPN 33 Padang over a period of three months, from the second week of January to the first week of May 2025. The subjects of this study were 32 students from Class VIII.1, consisting of 17 male and 15 female students. The focus of the study was to improve students' Social Studies achievement through the implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach integrated with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model.

The data collection techniques used in this study included questionnaires, observations, interviews, and documentation. Questionnaires were used to measure students' perceptions and interest in learning, observations were conducted to monitor students' activities during the learning process, interviews were used to obtain more in-depth information, and documentation was used to collect supporting data such as quiz scores. Data validation was carried out through source triangulation, by comparing information obtained from questionnaires, observations, and interviews to ensure data consistency.

Data analysis involved two main approaches: quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was used to process students' quiz scores, compare average scores, and determine the percentage of students who achieved learning mastery. The success criterion was set at a minimum of 85% of students

reaching the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), which is 70. Qualitative analysis was employed to describe changes in students' activities and participation based on data from questionnaires, observations, and interviews.

The research began with a pre-cycle stage, which aimed to identify initial problems. This included an initial quiz (pre-test), observations of student activity, and data collection through questionnaires and interviews. Cycle I was designed to implement the TaRL approach through the PBL model, involving activities such as group formation, material discussion, and group presentations. Based on the reflection from Cycle I, Cycle II focused on addressing the weaknesses identified previously, with more engaging and intensive activities to enhance equitable student participation.

The research activities were systematically conducted over a three-month period. The pre-cycle took place in the second week of January, followed by Cycle I, which was implemented from the third and fourth weeks of January to the first week of February. Cycle II was carried out from the fourth week of April to the first week of May 2025. All stages were carefully implemented to ensure that the interventions provided maximum impact on improving students' academic achievement.

The expected outcomes of this study include a significant improvement in students' Social Studies achievement, both in terms of average scores and their active involvement in the learning process. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for teachers and schools in implementing more relevant and effective instructional strategies.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Cycle In the pre-cycle stage, Social Studies learning in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang showed suboptimal results. The average class score was only 63.33, with only 50% of students achieving the minimum mastery score (≥70). The learning process tended to be monotonous, dominated by lecture-based instruction and individual practice questions. Students appeared passive, bored, and less engaged in the learning activities. Observations indicated that the lack of interaction among students with varying ability levels worsened the already monotonous learning atmosphere.

Cycle I In Cycle I, the intervention was conducted in two sessions, on April 15 and April 22, 2025. The actions were designed based on the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, implemented through the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model. Preparations included reviewing teaching modules and lesson plans (RPP) to ensure smooth implementation.

The learning activities began with motivation and apperception for about 10 minutes. In the main session, students were divided into discussion groups based on their seating arrangements. Each group worked on a student worksheet (LKS), followed by a class discussion to compare and validate their results. The teacher guided the students in drawing conclusions from the material. The session concluded with a homework assignment related to the next lesson.

The learning outcomes in Cycle I showed improvement, with the class average rising to 69.89, and 65% of students achieving the mastery score (≥70). Although there was progress, the classical mastery target of 85% had not yet been met. Observations revealed that while some students remained passive, most began to show interest and engagement in the group discussions.

The reflection from Cycle I identified that although academic performance had

improved, further efforts were needed to increase active student participation. The actions in Cycle II were therefore designed to address these shortcomings, with a focus on incorporating more engaging and varied activities.

Cycle II In Cycle II, the intervention was conducted on May 22 and May 29, 2025. The planning phase, based on reflections from Cycle I, involved refining the teaching modules, instructional scenarios, and learning materials. Group discussions remained a core activity, but with greater emphasis on active student interaction.

The results in Cycle II showed significant improvement. The class average increased to 83.3, with 90% of students achieving the mastery score. The lowest score recorded was 70, while the highest was 100. The learning process ran smoothly, and student participation increased dramatically. All students actively participated in both group and class discussions, demonstrating heightened motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

The reflection from Cycle II concluded that the classical mastery target of 85% had been successfully achieved. The implementation of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach integrated with the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model proved effective in improving the Social Studies achievement of Class VIII.1 students at SMPN 33 Padang.

This success highlights the importance of innovation in student-centered instructional strategies to create a learning environment that is dynamic, collaborative, and relevant.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the classroom action research conducted in Class VIII.1 at SMPN 33 Padang, it can be concluded that the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, implemented through the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, is highly effective in improving students' achievement in Social Studies. The average class score consistently increased from 63.33 in the pre-cycle, **to** 69.89 in Cycle I, and reached 83.3 in Cycle II, with 90% of students achieving the mastery level by the end of the study. These findings indicate that student-centered learning strategies that involve active and collaborative discussion can successfully address the learning difficulties previously faced by students, thereby creating a more engaging, relevant, and effective learning environment.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that teachers continue to develop innovative instructional practices by adapting learning models and approaches to students' needs and characteristics. Schools are expected to provide full support by offering the necessary facilities and resources to implement innovative learning strategies such as TaRL and Problem-Based Learning. For future research, it is suggested to explore the application of this approach across different grade levels, subjects, or learning contexts to enrich the findings and broaden the development of effective teaching strategies.

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